

number than those involved in my progress from the American college to the papal presence.

Indeed, the only occasion I can recall when in a foreign country I was able to get a bath without encountering all sorts of obstacles was also in Rome, four years ago, when I endeavored to order a bottle of mineral water in my choicest Italian, and got a bath instead, the wheeler-dealer chambermaid of whom I ordered it being little familiarly with his own tongue as "she spoke" by an American.

But precisely similar conditions exist in this country. Robert Browning in one of his famous poems lamented the difficulty of getting the Time, the Place, and the bed together; but if he had ever gone on the Chautauque circuit in this land I fear he would have written that of the well nigh impossible operation of getting the Time, the Place, and the Tub together; and I may add that I wish a law might be passed requiring hotels not to provide bathing facilities to supply also at least one towel that is visible to the naked eye.

The story of the man who asked an Indiana hotel clerk to "give" him "a room and a bath," to be greeted by the instant response, "We'll give you the room; but you'll have to wash yourself," contains quite as much truth as humor. I had to forgo my dip in a Southern hotel on one morning because "the last fellow that took a bath here ran off with the key to the door," and then on the following morning when the bathroom door had been forced open I found the tub constructed of tiles, with a lush growth of morning glory vines sprouting up between them. When in an Ohio hotel several years ago, having insisted upon a room with a bath, I found the latter in a dark cubbyhole whose doors and window had evidently not been opened for months. Atmospherically speaking, the Black Hole of Calcutta was a thing of sweetness and light compared to it. Nearly suffocated, I struggled with the frosted glass window at one side of the cell for several minutes, and finally with a supreme effort got it up; only to find that it opened on the inner corridor of the hotel.

AND be it recorded that the heating facilities are quite on a par with these. The heating apparatus of most hotels is either missing altogether, or terrifying in character. The latter sort is especially in evidence in the natural gas regions, where that useful commodity is used with an airy carelessness that inspires dreadful shudders.

I shall never forget my first introduction to natural gas as a heating proposition. It was in a historic edifice in Ohio, which I shall not name; for it has already been sufficiently advertised by its "loving friends." So far to say that by some strange oversight of Nature it still stands. To get to my room, in the first place, I was compelled to rise several flights in an elevator whose operation was as uncertain as its years, and then with the aid of a hallway to thread an intricate maze of interlocking corridors alongside of which the Dadaist Labyrinth was simplicity itself. Arrived finally in the room assigned to me, I found it dark, damp, and cold.

"How about a little heat here, Son?" said I, appealing to the hallway.

"Sure," said he.

The boy faded into the gloom of the far end of the room, leaned over, and tugged away vigorously for a few moments on a screw in the baseboard, and then standing back about two feet he began to bombard the wall with lighted matches—the kind which light only on the east of a bellboy's trousers. I shall not attempt to say how many of these he lit and threw at the wall before anything happened. It seemed to be an appalling number, and considering the manifest inflammability of the building, and the height of my room from the ground, it made me very nervous.

"What the dickens are you doing?" said I.

But there was neither time nor need for his answer. A well projected match seemed to hit the particular hallway he was aiming at. There came a boom and a flash, and in a second I saw a half-dozen stable boys creeping upward from the door to a point about six feet high on the wall, where by some strange miracle the conflagration stopped.

"What's that?" said the boy, with a look as he departed.

It had been my intention to remain overnight in that city; but when I realized that that same place was probably going on in at least a dozen other apartments, above, beside, and below me, I suddenly decided to return to New York on the night train. I will take my chances on the future life; but while I live, I mean to have my being upon this terrestrial orb I believe in getting fire risks down to their lowest possible minimum by adopting a policy of complete avoidance.

OUR clever newspaper humorists have made a good deal of capital out of the naughty hotel clerk with

the diamond stud; but I must confess that I have never yet encountered this individual in the wide swath of my wanderings. Save in one or two places, I have found on the contrary a genial solicitude for my welfare, wholly undecorated as to shirt-front, which has more than offset such shortcomings as were characteristic of the inn-keeper whose desks they presided.

On one occasion in Indianapolis I encountered what seemed at first to be a heartless lack of appreciation and cordial recognition on my arrival; but it was more than compensated for in the end, and I should add was rather the result of a too high expectation on my own part than the fault of the man behind the register. I had long wished to visit Indianapolis, largely because of its national reputation as a literary center. A State that has produced so many authors of high distinction as have come out of Indiana, with her General Lew Wallace, her James Whitcomb Riley, Charles Major, Meredith Nicholson, George Ade, Booth Tarkington, and those two purveyors of wholesome fiction and good, clean humor, the McCutcheon brothers, is entitled to some of the laureled interest of a literary Mecca, and I registered at the Claypool in my boldest hand, quietly and confidently expecting some immediate recognition, such as a not altogether unknown worker on the slopes of Parnassus might expect to receive on arriving at Olympus.

The room clerk whisked the register round and studied the inscription for a moment. "What's that—Boggs?" he inquired.

"No," said I, my crest falling a bit, "Bangs—John Ken—"

"Oh," said he, bringing his hand down heavily on the bell. "Fright, show this gentleman to number three hundred and nine."

He tossed a key to the bellboy, which the latter caught with the dexterity of a Back Ewing, the prize catcher in the ball games of my young manhood, and holding my diminished head as high as I could I followed him to the elevator, devoutly wishing that Riley or Ade would happen in and fall upon my neck, and show that low-browed room clerk a thing or two he wouldn't forget in a hurry.

And then came a sort of *amende honorable*. Scarcely had I got settled in number three hundred and nine when a second bellboy arrived, bearing a note addressed to "Mr. John Henry Banks," neatly typewritten, and reading as follows:

DEAR SIR:—If you wish a table for the display of your samples and a plug key for the protection of the same, please apply at the office.

Respectfully, THE CLAYPOOL.

It was a salutary experience, and in my subsequent visits to the Athens of America I have approached it in an appropriate spirit of humility and respect. And philosophically I have tried to comfort myself with the thought that after all it would not be very surprising if a scintilla of coal arriving at Newcastle were to find its evening a matter of small importance to those good people who dig that useful commodity out of the bowels of the earth at the rate of ten carloads a minute. Why should a mere writer of books arriving at Indianapolis expect to create any special commotion, when it is a well known fact that you could not possibly heave a brick in any direction in that charming city without hitting an author?

I THINK that for sheer originality in his craft, as well as for his human interest, I must award the palm among innkeepers I have met to a vigorous old fellow who

either ran, or was run by, a hotel I once visited in South Dakota. He was known to most people as "Conk"; not because of the rather hard shell one had to penetrate to get at him, but because it was the first syllable of his last name.

His hotel was a two-story brick structure, sadly in need of a Noachian Deluge for its preliminary renovation, and built upon the pleasing lines of an infant penitentiary. This illusion was faithfully carried out by the rooms within, which had many of the physical qualities of the cells of commerce. The hotel had a dining room; but Conk had given up serving meals therein, and laid also as far as I could observe abandoned everything else in the way of service as well.

My Muse and I arrived several hours before dawn, and after wandering hand in hand for twenty or thirty minutes along invisible highways reached the edifice. We registered, and were ushered to a pigeonhole on the second tier by a large, yellow-haired youth, who was trying to keep awake and mop up the office floor simultaneously, succeeding only indifferently in both operations. The particular cell set apart for our accommodation was lit by a half-candlepower bulb with a pronounced flicker, which shed a dim, religious light upon a walled-in space about ten feet square. In this there was a double bed, a nondescript piece of furniture which suggested a collision between a washstand and a bureau, a rocking chair that refused to rock, and a cane-bottomed arrangement of perilous spindles that wouldn't do anything else. After I had disposed of our two suitcases and my typewriting machine the only solution of another difficulty that immediately arose was to leave our feet out in the hall.

As soon as I noted the rather limited character of our accommodations I repaired below, to see if there was not available something a trifle more roomy; to find only the satisfaction involved in the contemplation of the two-headed six-footer lying asleep on a bench exchanging dreamy nothings with his mop, which he held hugged tight to his breast. With persistent effort I might have awakened the mop; but the tow-headed youth was too far gone into the land of dreams to be recalled by anything short of a universal cataclysm. I therefore crept sadly up the stairs to our cell, and we reclined on the double bed until dawn, at which time the merciful providence of the half-candlepower bulb was completely revealed unto us; for if we had been able to see that best in its dim light no power on earth, not all the mobilized armies of the world, could have induced us to lie down upon it.

An hour later we breakfasted on ham and eggs at a stand-up all-night lunch counter which we located after much wandering, and then, returning to the hotel, Brother Conk in all his muscular majesty dawned upon the horizon of my life. I can best describe him by saying that whatever he might do in action, a camera fiend would have found in him a perfect model for a snapshot of the long-looked-for White Hope. He was huge and indescribably red. His name should have been Rufus, and the hand of Esau was a smoothly shaved thing alongside the Conkian fist. He had a penetrating, yet rolling eye that would have subjugated a Kaiser with a single glance. He was scrutinizing his fingernails as we entered his presence, and in view of my supreme ambition to remain a hero always in the eyes of my Muse I saw her safely deposited in our hermetically sealed receiving vault above before venturing to address the gentleman. This done, I started in to pay my respects to Mine Host.

"I don't suppose you could let us have a larger room," said I tentatively, my words coming with a husky falter. "I dunno what room ya got," was the gruff response, one of the rolling eyes settling full upon both of mine. "We're in nun-number thirty-two," I ventured meekly. "Well, thirty-three's an inch and a half wider," said he, biting off a bang nail. "Ya can move into that if ya wanta."

It hardly seemed worth while, and considering that in respect to matters other than its size, or lack of it, we already knew the worst as to thirty-two, we left thirty-three unvisited on the principle that

—makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of.

There were enough wings loose in number thirty-two to enable us to fly anywhere on the face of the earth; but we decided not to avail ourselves of them.

"Never mind, my dear," said I. "Sufferance is the badge of all our tribe."

And the Only Muse merely laughed, and with femi-



"If it were possible to sweep a room clean with a welcoming wave of the hand—"



"Cannot sleep comfortably between the sheets of William James's pragmatic philosophy, dry as they are."